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UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

FOR

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR INHIBITING MOISTURE AND MOLD IN AN OUTER WALL OF A STRUCTURE

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a structure having an outer wall system, the construction of which provides for flow of air between an internal wall section and an external wall section for inhibiting moisture accumulation and mold growth on the internal wall section.

Description of the Related Art

In today's construction industry, numerous residential structures, and even a significant number of commercial structures such as, for example, apartment buildings, motels, restaurants, and strip shopping centers, have their exterior surfaces finished with a synthetic stucco-type coating applied over a foam insulation board. Such exterior finishes are generically referred to as Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems, and will be referred to hereinafter as EIFS.

While such EIFS constructions have proved to be quite satisfactory for their relative ease of installation, their insulating properties, and their ability to receive a variety of aesthetically-pleasing finishes, a serious problem associated with EIFS construction exists. This problem is one of moisture accumulation behind the exterior wall covering. As used herein, the term "moisture" refers to both liquid and airborne forms of water, including condensation. Such moisture may be the result of condensation or high humidity, but may also be the result of wind-driven water, that may enter behind the

exterior wall covering at any point where the exterior surface of the coating is penetrated. Such moisture accumulation may be the result of poor workmanship or design, deterioration of flashing or sealants over time, lesser quality doors or windows, or any other penetration or compromise of the exterior finish.

When such water penetration, high humidity, or condensation occurs, absent effective, reliable means for eliminating the moisture from behind the EIFS exterior construction, the moisture can remain trapped long enough before evaporating to damage or rot any moisture-sensitive elements to which the insulation is bonded, typically wood framing, oriented-strand board, plywood, or gypsum sheathing. In addition, the moist environment is a breeding ground for wood consuming insects and health hazards such as various varieties of molds. This problem is accelerated in hot and humid environments.

Attempts have been made to prevent entry of moisture into the building wall interior by sealing or caulking entry points in and around wall components as the primary defense against moisture intrusion, or by installing flashing around the wall components to divert the moisture. These attempts have not been completely successful. Sealants are not only difficult to properly install, but tend to deteriorate and separate from the wall component or wall due to climatic conditions, building movement, the surface type, or chemical reactions. Flashing is also difficult to install and may tend to hold the moisture against the wall component, accelerating the decay.

The use of sealants and flashing is also limited to the attempted minimization of moisture collection in building walls in new construction, and the further collection in existing structures. These materials are of no value in addressing the problem of moisture that has already entered a building wall interior. Thus, with solutions presented in the prior art, moisture still enters the wall interior, and the problem is further compounded by the prevention of any evaporation of the moisture already in the wall interior.

The problems of moisture penetration and accumulation have prevented the full use of new building cladding materials, and has resulted in many buildings with rotting framing structures, requiring extensive and expensive retrofitting. Thus, there is a great need for an system and method to prevent moisture from accumulating in the wall interior of a building at wall components, and for the removal of moisture that has already collected within the wall interior.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention contemplates a structure with an outer wall having an internal wall section and an external wall section with a flow passage in between. A circulation system flows air through the flow passage inhibiting moisture accumulation and mold growth.

In one preferred embodiment, a structure system comprises at least one outer wall having an internal wall section and an external wall section, where the external wall section is located such that there is an air flow passage between the internal wall section and the external wall section. A circulation system circulates air through the air flow passage to inhibit moisture on the internal wall section.

In another preferred embodiment, an essentially enclosed structure system comprises at least one outer wall having an internal wall section and an external wall section, where the external wall section is located such that there is an air flow passage between the internal wall section and the external wall section. A circulation system circulates air through the air flow passage to inhibit moisture on the internal wall section.

In another preferred embodiment, an essentially enclosed structure system comprises at least one outer wall having an internal wall section and an external wall section, where the external wall section is located such that there is an air flow passage between the internal wall section and the external wall section. A circulation system circulates air through the air flow passage to inhibit moisture on the internal wall section. At least one sensor generates a signal indicative of moisture and generates a signal in response thereto. A controller receives the signal from the at least one sensor and controls the circulation system to provide a predetermined relative humidity of the air flow in the air flow passage.

In one embodiment, a method is described for inhibiting moisture accumulation in an outer wall of a structure, comprising the steps of;

- providing an outer wall with an internal wall section and an external wall section with an air flow passage therebetween; and
- supplying air into the flow passage by an air circulation system to inhibit moisture accumulation on the internal wall section.

Examples of the more important features of the invention thus have been summarized rather broadly in order that the detailed description thereof that follows may be better understood, and in order that the contributions to the art may be appreciated. There are, of course, additional features of the invention that will be described hereinafter and which will form the subject of the claims appended hereto.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For detailed understanding of the present invention, references should be made to the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like elements have been given like numerals, wherein:

Figure 1 is a perspective drawing of a structure according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a schematic of a structure according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 3 is a block diagram of a circulation system according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 4 is a schematic of a structure according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to **FIGS. 1 and 2**, **FIG. 1** shows a perspective view and **FIG. 2** shows a sectional view of an outer wall **25** of a structure according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The structure **30** comprises a foundation slab **20** having a dual section outer wall **25** attached thereto. The dual section outer wall **25** has an un-insulated internal wall section **26** and an insulated external wall section **27** displaced a distance away from internal wall section **26** such that an air flow passage **17** is established between them. Conditioned air **16** is forced out through the air passage **17** by the air circulation system **45** shown in **FIG. 2** and described below, thereby inhibiting the accumulation of moisture and mold on the internal wall section **26**.

The external wall section **27** is constructed with an exterior insulation and finish system, commonly referred to as EIFS, which comprises a weather resistant outer surface **2**, typically of synthetic stucco, attached to a thermal insulating layer **21**. Alternatively, any suitable weather resistant material may be used, including, but not limited to, brick tile, stone tile, wood siding, pressed board siding, and cementitious siding. The thermal insulating layer **21** is typically formed from an expanded polystyrene foam, but may alternatively be made from a polycyanurate or polyurethane foam, or from any suitable insulation material. The insulating layer **21** is, in turn, attached to a sheathing layer **4**,

typically a cementitious material known in the art. The external wall section 27 is attached to furring strips 6 which are in turn attached to the internal wall section 26 using attachment techniques known in the art. The furring strips 6 serve to establish the size of the flow passage 17 and to secure the outer wall section 27 to the inner wall section 26. Furring strips 6 can also be positioned to direct the flow of air 16 in the passage 17. The furring strips can be any suitable furring strips known in the art, with a “Z” shaped galvanized steel strip being preferred. Drain channel 18 is located near the bottom of passage 17 and is sloped to provide a drainage for any condensation or water which may need to be expelled from passage 17. Channel 18 may be solid and thereby used to direct the air flow 16 exiting from the passage 17. Alternatively, channel 18 may have multiple holes allowing moisture and air flow 16 to exit at the base of the exterior wall 25.

The inner wall section 26 comprises a commercially available liquid barrier 8 attached to an external sheathing 10 which is typically a commercially available plywood or oriented stranding board (OSB). The liquid barrier 8 prevents the passage of liquid water but allows for the passage of gases and water vapor and is well known in the art. The external sheathing 10 is attached to and supported by the framing studs 12. Any suitable framing stud material can be used including wood and metal materials. An interior sheathing 14 such as paneling, drywall board, or other suitable interior surface is attached to the interior side of the framing studs 12. The inner wall section 26, contrary to common construction, has minimal, or no insulation in its internal cavities. The lack of insulation minimizes the temperature gradient between the interior sheathing 14 and the

external sheathing 10 in order to inhibit any condensation in the internal spaces of the inner wall section 26. The flow of appropriately conditioned air 16 through the flow passage 17 bordered by external sheathing 10 provides an air temperature at the external sheathing essentially the same as the air temperature inside the structure 30 thereby inhibiting condensation on the liquid barrier 8 or the sheathing 10.

As shown in FIG. 2, in a preferred embodiment, the circulation system 45 is located in an attic space 36 of structure 30. The attic 36 is bounded by roof 22 and ceiling 29. Roof 22 is connected to and essentially sealed with external wall section 27 by flashing 28 which extends around the periphery of structure 30. Conditioned air 16 from the circulation system 45 is forced through duct 33 into the interior 50 of structure 30. The air 16 exits the interior space 50 through a plurality of ceiling vents 34 which exhaust into the attic space 36. The attic space acts as a plenum for circulation system 45. Air enters the circulation system 45 through inlet damper 43 in attic 36 and outside makeup air 44 enters through makeup damper 46 and the combined intake air flows through blower 42 and into heating and cooling elements in conditioner 40, through duct 32 into humidifier 38 for maintaining a predetermined relative humidity. The heater elements (not shown), in conditioner 40 may be electric or gas type elements common in the art, or any other suitable heating elements. The cooling system (not shown) in conditioner 40 may be a conventional compressor/condenser type system. Alternatively, a heat pump system may be used for heating and cooling the air. Guidelines for selecting the predetermined relative humidity are available in published documents of The American Society of

Heating, Refrigeration, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), *Standard 62-1999, Ventilation for Acceptable Indoor Air Quality*, which indicates that the relative humidity should be maintained below about 70% to inhibit fungal contamination including, but not limited to, molds and mildew. The actual relative humidity and air flow requirements will be structure specific and are determined using procedures and standards known in the art.

The conditioned air flows through duct 33 and into interior space 50 and as previously described, exhausts through vents 34 into attic 36. The addition of the outside makeup air 44 to the air volume existing in the essentially sealed structure creates a suitable positive pressure in the structure 30 and attic 36 relative to the outside environment, and causes conditioned air to flow 16 through the air flow passage 17 in the outer wall 25. In a preferred embodiment, the blower 42 operates continuously forcing an essentially continuous flow of conditioned air 16 through the passage 17, thereby inhibiting the buildup of moisture and mold on the inner wall section 26.

The dampers 43 and 46 may be manually set to provide the appropriate flows. Alternatively, the dampers 43 and 46 may have actuators (not shown) which may be controlled remotely.

In one preferred embodiment, see FIG. 3, temperature and relative humidity sensors 62 and 63 are disposed in passage 17 to measure the temperature and relative humidity of conditioned air flow 16. Signals from the sensors are received by a control system 60, which may contain sensor interface circuits, a processor, and output control circuits for

actuating devices in the circulation system 45. As shown in FIG 3., control system 60 receives signals from sensors 62 and 63 and acts according to programmed instructions to actuate makeup air damper 46, intake damper 43, blower 42, conditioner 40, and humidity controller 38 to maintain a predetermined temperature and relative humidity in conditioned air flow 16.

In another preferred embodiment, see FIG. 4, conditioned air is split from duct 33 and travels in header 52 around the periphery of the attic space 36. Multiple discharge ducts 54 direct conditioned air 16 from the header towards the opening of passage 17. The air flow is controlled by multiple dampers 56 on multiple discharge ducts 54. The dampers 56 may be manually set or, alternatively, may be fitted with actuators (not shown) which may be remotely controlled by control system 60.

In another preferred embodiment, a plurality of blowers(not shown) may be mounted so as to intake the conditioned attic air and discharge the air directly into the passage 17 at a plurality of predetermined locations around the perimeter of the structure. The passage of the discharged air passing between the furring strips 6 act to create a venturi effect to induce flow from between adjacent furring strips 6.

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, that the circulation system 45 may be wholly located external to the structure 30 with air flow to and from the structure 30 through suitable conduit or ducting (not shown). Alternatively, the circulation system 45

may be partially located in the structure 30 and partially located external to the structure 30 as is common in home systems. It is also to be understood that local environmental conditions and local building codes will, to some extent dictate the individual components used.

The foregoing description is directed to particular embodiments of the present invention for the purpose of illustration and explanation. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art that many modifications and changes to the embodiment set forth above are possible without departing from the scope and the spirit of the invention. It is intended that the following claims be interpreted to embrace all such modifications and changes.